GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1137
ANSWERED ON:02.08.2006
LIBERALISING VISAS TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES
Gaikwad Shri Eknath Mahadeo;Kharventhan Shri Salarapatty Kuppusamy;Mane Smt. Nivedita;Singh Shri Kirti Vardhan

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) Whether Pakistan has liberalized the issue of visa to Indian nationals to attract more tourists from the country;

(b) If so, the details thereof;

(c) Whether the Indian Government has also responded with liberalisation of visas to Pakistani nationals;

(d) If so, the details thereof;

(e) Whether the Union Government proposes to liberalise visa regime to neighbouring countries; and

(f) If so, the details thereof ?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED)

(a) − (b) On 30 June 2006, Pakistani Federal Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao announced that Pakistan had made 'very substantial changes' to the existing Pakistan visa policy in order to make it a tourist, trade, business and investor friendly country. He said that special care had been taken to promote travel and tourism with India. However, India is not included in the Pakistani list of 69 'Business Friendly' countries and 23 'Tourist Friendly' countries announced. Some India-specific measures announced by Pakistan include, inter alia, visa for civil society, senior citizens, widows and divorcees enhanced from three months to two years, visa of 30 days instead of 14 days for Group Tourists from India through designated tour operators, Pilgrimage Visa to Indian nationals (not less than 10 in number) to visit specified holy shrines in Pakistan for 15 days instead of 5 days allowed earlier, introduction of 'Business Visa' envisaging 6 months duration with multiple entries and maximum stay of 30 days subject to production of requisite documents, and expeditious processing of diplomatic and non-diplomatic visas of Indian diplomats posted in Pakistan.

(c) - (d) Government firmly believes that people to people contact is a significant factor in generating goodwill and promoting bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, and it has consistently endeavoured to negotiate a visa regime that encourages such contacts. In keeping with this policy, Government announced unilateral visa liberalizations in September 2004, which included, inter alia, multiple entry visas for accredited journalists, exemption from reporting to the police for various categories of Pakistani nationals such as those above 65 years of age, academicians, and doctors. In December 2004, Government announced additiona l visa liberalization measures such as visa on arrival at Wagah for certain categories of people and grant of student visas for allowing admission in Indian institutions to Pakistani students on a case-by-case basis.

India presented a draft proposing amendments to the present India-Pakistan Visa Agreement during the visit of former External Affairs Minister to Pakistan from 2-5 October 2005. The draft envisages longer duration visit visas for people from both countries and proposes the addition of new categories of visas such as student, pilgrims and business visa to facilitate easier movement of people across the border. Pakistan has not given its response to this draft visa agreement.

(e) − (f) Visa regime with China was simplified in 2003 with the signing of the new MoU on Simplification of Visa Procedures between the Government of India and People's Republic of China. In respect of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar Government already has an appropriately liberal visa regime. Besides, the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme became operational from March 1, 1992. The scheme is applicable to certain approved categories of persons from SAARC countries.